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ABSTRACT

Noting that the bulk of intercultural teaching and research has taken the culture-general approach to the exclusion of a culture-specific focus, this paper (1) argues that the distinction between the two approaches is artificial and unnecessary, and (2) develops a framework for intercultural communication that incorporates a culture-specific focus as the basis for helping students understand the intercultural communication process. Following the introduction, the first section of the paper discusses the limitations of the culture-general approach. The second section then offers a culture-specific framework for teaching intercultural communication. The third section discusses using the culture-specific approach with both a culture-general understanding of the intercultural communication process and culture-specific expertise concerning the communication behavior of a particular cultural group. (HTH)

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A CULTURE-SPECIFIC FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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Sets are seldom perceived in isolation. . . they appear in context . . . the interpretation of their significance depends upon a knowledge of the patterns in which they are used.

- - Edward T. Hall

The Silent Language

INTRODUCTION

Courses in intercultural communication have become increasingly popular in colleges and universities over the past few years. Quite a number of new textbooks have been written (see for example, Prosser, 1978; Samovar, Porter and Jain, 1981; Sarbaugh, 1979; Dodd, 1982; Condon and Youseff, 1975). At least one new professional organization, The Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research (SIETAR), has come into being. More and more of the programs and journals of the International Communication Association (ICA) and the Speech Communication Association (SCA) reflect the concerns of teaching intercultural communication. Smith (1981), in his review of syllabi, texts, articles, and convention programs, outlines what he found to be the three principal reasons for studying and teaching intercultural communication:

(1) To enhance individual capabilities for effective interaction in international and intercultural environments;

(2) To promote a general sensitivity to human relations and cultural differences;

(3) To achieve a more worldly and sophisticated view of the world; to gain tolerance and charity for all peoples and to widen opportunities to interact with them; to help individuals feel at home everywhere, perhaps to find more congenial alternatives to one's own ways of life.

While Smith went on to argue that these may not be the most appropriate goals for teaching intercultural communication, most of those who teach such courses would express essential agreement with the central thrusts outlined above related to pedogogy in intercultural communication (see for example the response to Smith by Williams, 1982).

One of the most common distinctions made when teaching intercultural communication is between a "culture-general" and a "culture-specific" approach to the subject. This distinction follows from the differentiation by Kenneth Pike (1966) between "etic" and "emic" standpoints for the description of behavior, which he coined from the linguistic terms "phonetic" and "phonemic." The etic standpoint treats a group of cultures together, analyzing them with criteria created by the analyst and providing an external "alien" view of the various systems. The emic view, on the other hand, is applied to one cultural group at a time, analyzing it from the view of one familiar with the system and who knows how to function within it, thus providing an internal view of the system using criteria chosen from within the culture. The etic view allows units to be viewed in relative isolation from other units within the system but stresses the relation of the unit to similar units within other systems. The emic view, on the other hand, requires that every unit be seen in relation to how it is distributed and how it functions within a larger setting, as part of a hierarcy of settings within that particular system. An etic description can be given with only partial information concerning any one particular system, whereas an emic analysis requires a knowledge of the total system from which the criteria for analysis draw their significance. Pike uses the illustration of describing an automobile to point out the essential differences between the two approaches. An etic approach might describe the elements one at a time as they are found in some kind of storage room where the different parts, such as bolts, screws, fenders, generators and motors from various models and makes of cars have been systematically filed in accordance with some general criteria. An emic approach would describe the structural functioning of a particular car as a whole, discussing the parts of the car as they relate to one another.

Most often it is assumed that if the purpose of the intercultural communication course is to increase the cultural awareness of the students and to demonstrate the effects of culture on communication, then a culture-general approach is most appropriate. When the purpose is to prepare a group of people for overseas experience in a specific country, then a culture-specific approach is usually adlpted. It is the argument of this paper that this commonly accepted distinction is an artificial one and unnecessary limiting, if not outright determential to the accomplishment of the goals of teaching intercultural communication. The bulk of intercultural communication teaching and research has taken the culture-general approach almost exclusively, with seeming disregard for culture-specific information.

The attempt in this paper will be to develop a framework for teaching intercultural communication, and hopefully encouraging research, which incorporates a culture-specific focus as the basis for helping students understand the intercultural communication process. It will be argued that the general aims and goals of intercultural communication pedagogy can be accomplished by treating a particular culture as a whole rather than focusing on "scattered" examples from various cultures. Individuals can become more effective in interacting within intercultural environments, can develop a general sensitivity to cultural differences, and can achieve a more sophisticated view of the world by focusing on a specific cultural group. Indeed, it is argued that this focus on a specific cultural group is necessary in order to accomplish the above stated goals.

The argument to be made in this paper is best stated in the following manner: While we must conceive of the relationship established between parties from two different cultures as a system within it self, and thus approachable from a culture-general view, the understanding of each party's cultural system is a precondition for understanding the intercultural system created by their interaction. As pointed out by Sigman (1980):

> With regard to the issue of intercultural communication, sociolinguistic and ethnographic researchers first take as their starting point the specific communication rules brough to encounters by diverse cultural actors and the degree to which these rules facilitate or hinder subsequent interaction and rule negotiation. . . . the observer must consider the actors' separate behavioral regularities and the structure of the interaction which results when the regularities are not shared. (p. 44, emphasis added)

The underlying basis for this argument is amply stated in story form by Donald Batchelder (1977). In his story of the "Green Banana" he points out that all of us tend to see our own culture as the center of the world. However, once a conscious breakthrough is made to a second center, a lifelong process of exploration has begun. Studying a particular cultural group in depth can provide a "breakthrough" to a second center, opening a whole new perspective for the students, allowing them a framework for viewing ways of life which are different from their own. Thus, knowledge of a specific cultural group can become the facilitative mechanism through which an understanding is gained of the intercultural communication process.

LIMITATIONS OF THE CULTURE-GENERAL APPROACH

An examination of the course syllabi included in SIETAR's publication on teaching intercultural communication (Hoopes, 1977) indicated that practically all of the courses offered at that time used the culture-general approach. The only exceptions to this were two courses designed specifically to provide insight into one specific culture, and one course which surveyed a number of specific cultural groups. Almost all of the culture-general approaches included topics such as the following: nature of culture, culture and perception, culture and values, culture and verbal language, culture and nonverbal language, and improving intercultural communication. For the most part, these courses could pass for introductory communication courses with the element of culture added. Almost all course syllabi listed readings which dealt with aspects of specific cultures, but few courses included more than two or three readings on any one specific culture, with these being primarily sociological in focus. The basic assumption underlying all of these courses seems to be that students can best gain an awareness of the effects of culture on communication by explaining such important communication variables as perception, values, language, and nonverbal behavior and then using numerous examples to illustrate the effects of culture on these variables. Since the students are being prepared for contact with a variety of different cultures, it is reasoned that an indepth knowledge of particular cultures is unnecessary and even limiting. The attempt is to give students a "general" understanding of culture and communicaton by providing "general" examples and illustrations.

The culture-general approach, while providing many useful insights for students into the nature of culture and communication, can be criticized on three major grounds: (1) It fails to provide an understanding of culture as a system; (2) It leads to inappropriate comparisons between the students'

own culture and others which might be encountered, and (3) It does not allow the behaviors studied to be placed in proper context by the students.

Culture-general approaches to teaching tend to focus on specific bits of the cultural whole, and thus they are almost never able to provide an understanding of the cultural system as such. Instead, when explaining how culture influences the use of verbal language, for instance, the tendency is to present a view of how the Japanese, Arabs, etc. use language differently from Westeners. While it may be interesting to learn such items, the primary learning gained by the student is to see that there is a difference, and perhaps that this difference makes a difference. To learn how language use fits in with the other parts of the culture (i.e., how it is tied to the cultural value system or how it influences interaction in the family, etc.) is generally not explained because it would require too much time focusing on a single culture. By focusing on general variables in a general way the role of a part of the culture to is whole is not gained.

The culture-general approach often uses comparisons and contrasts between cultures as a way of illustrating principles. For example, when dealing with nonverbal behavior, comparisons are made between the manner in which two cultural groups say "yes" and "no" or wave goodbye to one another, or less superficially, comparisons are made between the different notions of privacy or approaches to reaching consensus. Again, students become aware that differences exist and that these affect communication, but in many instances concepts are compared uncritically and inappropriately. Mestenhauser (1981) provides a good example of the pitfalls of inappropriate comparisons. He discusses the notion of "Theory Z" management concepts used by the Japanese and how these are often proposed for American corporations because they work so well for the Japanese. He reminds us that in order to understand the Japanese approach to management one would have to have a culture-specific

understanding of Japanese culture which would include a grasp of the following concepts: the corporation itself, loyalty, harmony, a "way of perfection," sense of obligation, emotional sympathy, formal concensus, informal "groundwork" needed to be done to reach consensus, informal "groundwork" needed to be done to reach concensus, symbolic communication, "dependency" (amae), private self and public self, nonverbal communication, and rules of relationships - to list a few. He warns us that all of these concepts, while they have their Japanese names," are difficult to understand in their translation because these concepts have often several variations, and because they fit into the Japanese cognitive mapping rather than ours" (p.4). Mestenhauser feels that the culture-general approach often concludes with a mere juxtaposition of differences; leaving the student with a "show-and-tell" approach to culture learning: this is the way they do, and this is the way we do. The problems with equivalencies becomes obvious. He calls for a deeper understanding of the receiving and sending cultures gained through a culture-specific approach.

Perhaps the most limiting aspect of the culture-general approach is its inadequate treatment of context. Edward Hall (1976) reminds us that all messages necessarily omit or distort a great deal of necessary information, and it is by contexting that we are able to fill in the missing details. When we use a variety of examples to illustrate general principles about language, nonverbal messages, norms, etc., we are not able to supply students with an appropriate context for interpreting these examples. It is a bit like displaying cultural artifacts in a museum. Farb (1978) reminds us that such a display is always a lie, because the artifacts are stripped of their social reality and presented only as a physical object. He uses the example of displaying an Eskimo kayak, arguing that its physical presence in a museum cannot be regarded as a substitute for the idea of "kayak-ness," because certain aspects of a kayak, including who owns it, who is allowed to ride in it, taboos concerning its use, etc., cannot be transported to a museum. Nevertheless, these aspects are just as much a part of the

kayak as its wooden frame and skin cover, and only when such things are known can anyone begin to understand the meaning of a kayak to the Eskimo.

Pike (1966), who first made the distinction between culture-general ("etic") and culture-specific ("emic") approaches, quotes Saphir to show that context is necessary for a correct interpretation. He asks the reader to try and make a report of the actions of a group of culturally different others engaged in some activity. Even though the reporter may be a skillful writer and able to give a picturesque account of what he/she sees and hears, the description would likely be unintelligible and unacceptable to the actors themselves. It will probably contain all manner of distortion, with emphasis given to the wrong actions, finding interesting what the actors find a casual behavior not worthy of comment and failing to observe the crucial turning points in the course of action which provide its real significance.

Hall uses LaBarre's (1962) example of the "donut dunking GI" teaching an Arab "all there is to know about donut dunking." The point is made that the Arab needs to know much more than how it is done. One must understand a whole complex of American values related to social mobility, conformity, friendliness, male-female relations and much more. By failing to provide students with a context for interpreting examples, we are increasing the chances of misinterpretation, leading to a superficial understanding of cultures and perhaps to dysfunctional stereotypes.

Despite its limitations, the culture-general approach seems to predominate as a teaching method. This approach is more widely used, I believe, for three major reasons. First, most teachers of intercultural communication come out of a social sicence background rather than a rhetorical or anthropological background. The social science model emphasizes generalizations of a universal nature rather than patterns characterizing a specific ("limited") group of people. Social science in essence provides a process-oriented model rather than a people-oriented model. Rhetorical and Anthropological approaches are

more concerned with understanding specific phenomona. Few who teach intercultural communication have adopted the rhetorical model.

A second major reason for the popularity of the culture-general approach is that few who teach intercultural communication have a culture speciality. While some have lived and worked estensively overseas or have worked closely with a particular ethnic or cultural group in the U.S., far too many have no intimate understanding of a particular cultural group other than their own. While most of these people are able to help students gain an awareness of general problems that exist in the intercultural encounter, they do not have the expertise necessary for a culture-specific approach.

Third, perhaps the most important reason for the wide use of cultural general approaches is the lack of culture-specific communication data. Even a person who decided to focus on a particular cultural group as the content for a course in intercultural communication would be forced to use primarily sociological and anthropological data. Communication researchers simply have not yet begun to adequately explore communication phenomona related to specific cultures. This deficiency is best summed up by Barnlund (1975):

> There are of course, shelves and shelves of books on the cultures of the world. They cover the history, religion, political thought, music, sculpture, and industry of many nations. And they make fascinating and provocative reading. But only in the vaguest way do they suggest what it is that really distinguishes the behavior of a Samoan, a Congolese, a Japanese, or an American. (p.)

Later, Barnlund laments this lack of data again:

> About some . . . codes, such as language, we have extensive knowledge. About others, such as gestures and facial codes, we have only rudimentary knowledge. On many others - rules governing topical appropriateness, customs regulating physical

contact, time and space codes, strategies for the management of conflict - we have almost no systematic knowledge. (p.)

In summary, the culture-general standpoint, when used as the single apprcach to teaching intercultural communication, has serious shortcomings. Despite these limitations, it seems to predominate as a teaching method. The following sction will discuss a pedagogical approach which incorporates the culture-specific standpoint.

A CULTURE-SPECIFIC FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

While developing a framework for teaching intercultural communication from a culture-specific perspective is no easy task, hampered by a lack of a sufficient data base of descriptions of communication phenomona within specific cultural groups, there are certain advantages to using a framework which incorporates the general goals of intercultural communication pedagogy but which accomplishes these goals through focus on communication behavior within a specific culture.

A culture-specific approach, if successfully designed, would accomplish three major student learning objectives. First, it would help the student gain an understanding of the way in which culture is constructed as a system rather than a series of miscellaneous parts. Second, it would help the student understand the internal world of individual actors in their social environment by showing how events are contexted within a cultural framework. Third, it would provide the student with a basis for developing specific skills necessary for effective interaction with individuals from that particular cultural environment. The end result of this process would be more than simply knowledge of a particular culture's communication patterns; it would also lead to the student's increased awareness and sensitivity to cultural differences wherever they might be encountered. In short, the overall attempt is to accomplish what Pike (1966) calls a "tri-dimensional understanding" of human behavior by using both an etic lens, which views behavior from a perspective oriented to all comparable events, and an emic lens, which views events from the perspective of how those particular events function within that particular culture. The remainder of this section will propose a framework which will allow one to accomplish this tri-dimensional understanding through synthesis of culture-specific and culture-general approaches.

Hall (1976) suggests that the context in which a message occurs carries a great deal of the meaning to be assigned to the message. Without context, Hall

says, the code is incomplete since it encompassses only part of the message. The level of context provides the foundation on which interpretation takes place, as it provides the "missing information" that is not contained in the code itself. Hall suggests that contexting involves both internal processes which takes place in the brain as a function of both past experience and the structure of the nervous system, and external processes which is a function of the setting in which an event occurs.

The notion of "contexting" provides the basis for approaching the concept of culture as a socially created system of hierarchically structured contextual units within which individual units of action are interpreted. Culture thus provides the external context for assignment of meaning. The notion that individual meaning is hierarchically contexted is common to a number of communication theories, and is most succiently stated by Pearce and Cronen (1980). Their coordinated management of meaning theory (CMM) is based on the notion that any single act is subsumed within a context which provides an interpretive framework for viewing that act. A complex network of relations exist among meanings within and among various hierarchical levels. While the number of levels which compose this hierarchy would depend upon one's particular focus of convenience, it is proposed here that a culture-specific approach to teaching intercultural communication can profitably view the structure of culture as involving the following conceptual units (See Figure 1): (A) Cultural Value System; (B) Social Systems; (C) Situational Frames; (D) Relational and Identity Messages which are exchanged within situations. These units are hierarchically organized such that any particular message at one level must be contexted within the next highest level in order to be given a meaningful interpretation. Thus, in order to interpret (in the United States) a particular person's action (a positive comment about the watch another is wearing) as a compliment (relational level), one would need to know that the actors were involved in a social greeting ritual (situational level) between friends (social system level). And in order to fully understand

this action, one would need to know that friendships in the United States are usually characterized by attitudes of friendliness, implied equality of status, and attempts to stroke the other's ego (value level). Of course, in a different cultural context, the positive comment might be interpreted as a request for the watch, because social greetings between friends are characterized by different rules of interaction and are based on different value systems.

This model begins with the notion that the key to understanding any particular cultural system is to gain knowledge of its underlying value structure. Communication rules and communication behavior is rooted in values and value orientations (Kluckholn and Strodtbeck, 1961) related to world view, activity orientation, perception of human nature, perception of self, and social organization (see Stewart, 1971). Values, of course, lie "below the surface" of a culture and reflect intricacies and deep structures that escape casual observation, but to gain an accurate interpretation of actions at a lower level, these actions must be contexted within the cultural value system. By beginning with the study of cultural values, students gain a firm basis for viewing culture as a system, and at the same time they gain a key for understanding actor's meanings within that culture. And if attempts are made to compare the value structure of the culture with the student's own value system, then increased cultural self-awareness results, which is one of the chief aims of the culture-general approach.

Edward Hall (1976) suggests that one of the best means for learning another culture is to observe the various social systems around which social life is structured. Basic social systems in most cultures would include friendships, marriages, families, work teams, school systems, business organizations, government institutions, religious establishments, the military, the courts, the marketplace, and any instance where two or more individuals function as a unit to accomplish common goals. In describing a particular cultural system, a focus should be given to the role positions within the system, the expectations

associated with these roles, the relation of various roles to one another, and the function of the particular social system within the overall society. Again, students can be asked to compare the social systems with their own, thus gaining greater awareness of how societies organize themselves differently.

While social systems provide the structure around which society is organized, situational frames (Hall, 1976) provide the context in which action occurs. Situational frames consist of such activities as greeting, working, eating, bargaining, fighting, problem-solving, entertaining, socializing, celebrating (weddings, birthdays, funerals, etc.), and courting. Each is characterized by what Hall calls "action chains", or sequences of events which have a beginning, climax, and ending, and a number of intermediate stages. Situational frames and their action chains are governed by what Pearce and Cronen (1980) and others have called regulative rules. It becomes important in describing another culture to learn the rules which govern various situations, how situational frames relate to one another, how they function within the social system of which they are a part (as well as how they differ within various social systems), and the values which underlie the activities. In studying situational frames and their action chains, the intercultural communication process can be addressed directly, if students are guided to consider what might happen when individuals following different rule systems attempt to interact. In this way, another important objective of a pure culture-general approach is accomplished, only with more impact, by using culture-specific information.

The result of interaction within any situational frame is the exchange of messages between participants. In addition to the actual content of the messages, the participants always exchange messages about how they see themselves and the relationship (see Watslawick, Beavin, and Jackson, 1967). Through language use, nonverbal behavior, and use of space, time and silence participants give compliments, offer criticisms, make requests, show attraction,

indicate trust, establish respect, confer status, show interest or disinterest, communicate friendliness, exhibit self-confidence, and any number of other relational and identity messages. Various constitutive rules (see Pearce and Cronen, 1980) govern how these are exchanged, and students learning a particular culture should attempt to describe these rules as they function within particular situational frames. These messages are the essence of communicative behavior and ultimately determine the relationship among the participants.

Missing from this framework are the traditional sections on verbal and nonverbal communication, but these considerations are present throughout the framework. Descriptions of social systems, situational frames, and relational and identitiy messages involve discussions of how language functions within the context to influence thought and behavior, and differences in nonverbal behavior are discussed whenever the focus is upon individual and collective action. Thus, none of the topics of the culture-general approach are "lost"; they are simply treated within a more comprehensive framework.

It is the contention here that the above framework provide a fruitful approach to accomplishing the aims of intercultural communication pedagogy. Students gain increased self-awareness of themselves as a cultural being and a greater understanding of the communication process in an intercultural setting, and at the same time they gain an appreciation of culture as a system and a means of contexting what they see in the other culture.

UTILIZING THE CULTURE-SPECIFIC APPROACH

While the culture-general approach to teaching intercultural communication has certain disadvantages wich are in many ways corrected by the culture-specific approach, the latter is not without its faults, especially when used alone. It is most often used in the context of preparing individuals for living and/or doing business in a specific country or with a specific group of people. With this as a primary purpose, three consequences arise. First, the goal of this teaching or training is seldom to enhance general intercultural awareness and sensitivity but rather to deal with a specific situation. The individual going through such a course seldom gains insights into the nature of culture and its influence on human behavior. Second, the content of such a course most often resembles a list of do's and don't rather than an understanding of culture as a system. Individuals taking such a course are primarily concerned with the behavioral tip of the cultural iceberg and seldom with the underlying value structure. Third, many times the individual teaching such a course, while he or she may have experience living within the culture being described, does not have a general understanding of the intercultural communication process. Lacking such an understanding themselves, it is very unlikely that students will gain significant insights into the nature of culture.

Taken together, the consequences of the typical uses of the culture-specific approach have lead to a negative image of using it as a teaching method. Many argue that culture-specific training actually results in less effectiveness. Some State Department research shows that individuals receiving only country-specific training function less effectively than those receiving no training before taking an assignment. While certain deficiences do exist when the culture-specific approach is used alone, these limitations are not inherent within the culture-specific approach itself. If used in the appropriate manner, the consequences need not be negative. In order to accomplish the objectives

of the culture-specific approach, the individual instructor would need to have both a culture-general understanding of the intercultural communication process and culture-specific expertise concerning the communication behavior of a particular cultural group. From this orientation, the instructor would be able to explain the nature of culture and illustrate by describing in detail a specific cultural group. The influence of culture on communication can then be shown by considering how messages are exchanged and given meaning within that specific cultural group. As attitudes, assumptions, beliefs, and values of the cultural group are discussed, the students can be encouraged to make comparisons with their own in order to gain a greater understanding of their own culture and its influence on their behavior. The effects of stereotyping and other barriers to communication can be discussed in terms of how they affect interaction with individuals from that group. The notions of nonevaluativeness and other attitudes which lead to more effective communication can be given a "down-to-earth" meaning as students come to understand how specific behaviors function within the overall structure of the cultural system. Finally, the notion of communication skills which improve interaction can gain validity (which is not possible except in a very vague sense using the culture-general approach) as students study the rules which guide interaction within that particular cultural group. In short, the instructor is combining the best of both worlds, accomplishing the aims of a culture-general approach while avoiding its limitations by adding the depth of culture-specific information.

In order to be successful, the instructor must keep the intercultural communication process as the primary focus of the course. That is, the communication behavior in the described cultural group must be considered in relation to the implications they hold for interaction with individuals from a different cultural group. Without this focus, the course could be taught as a special anthropology course.

By considering how intercultural interaction is affected by the cultural differences, the student not only gains access to the worldview of another cultural system, but at the same time she comes to see herself as a cultural being who must continually adjust when in interaction with another cultural being. In this way, the student's awareness and sensitivity have been expanded, and his capability for effectiveness in an intercultural environment has been expanded. Most importantly, these accomplishments are no longer of a vague and superficial nature, but they have taken on concrete meaning in the context of specific information about how culture functions as a system within which genuine human beings operate.

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LEVEL 4 — CULTURAL VALUE SYSTEM

World View, Activity Orientation, Perception of Human Nature, Perception of Self, Social Organization

LEVEL 3 — SOCIAL SYSTEMS

Friendships, marriage, family, work teams, school systems, business organizations, Government Institutions, the marketplace, religious establishments

LEVEL 2 — SITUATIONAL FRAMES

Greeting, Working, eating, bargaining, fighting, problem-solving, entertaining, socializing, celebrations (weddings, birthdays, funerals, etc.), courtship

LEVEL 1 — RELATIONAL AND IDENTITY MESSAGES

Compliments, criticisms, requests, attraction, trust, respect, status, interest/disinterest, integrity, honor, friendliness, insult, reverence, ingratiation, sincerity, self-confidence

FIGURE 1

A framework for approaching culture as a system of hierarchically structured contextual units